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ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 of this study introduces the education service agency (ESA) by briefly examining its history and reviewing recent research on its present status. Identifying three basic ESA patterns (special district, regionalized agencies, and cooperative agencies), the initial chapter observes that, although most ESA's were not established until the 1960's and 1970's, by 1981 there were regional service agencies in 39 states. Chapter 2 discusses national characteristics of ESA's in such areas as governance, finances, programs and services, and staff relationships. Chapter 3 focuses on the extent to which ESA's are meeting the needs of their constituents through improving educational practice, providing administrative services, and offering direct student services. Chapter 4, which constitutes roughly half the study, makes short-term (5 years), middle-term (10 to 12 years), and long-term (turn of the century) predictions concerning the ESA's future role. Following a list of nine recommendations in chapter 5 that include creating a climate conducive to shared decision-making with constituents and continuing the professional development of ESA staff, the study concludes with a brief summary. (JBM)

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The American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA)

The American Association of Educational Service Agencies was established in 1977 to provide a strong national voice for county, intermediate, and education service agencies. It functions under the umbrella of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and provides special services to member districts including: newsletters, convention and training programs, research and development activities, representation in the nation's capital, and a link with other national, regional and state agencies. For information, contact AAESA, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209 (703/528-0700).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION 1
What is an ESA? 1
The ESA in the past 2
The ESA today 3

Chapter 2
NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS 5
Governance 5
Finances 6
Programs and services 6
Staff relations 7

Chapter 3
RESEARCH: WHAT'S THE LATEST 9
Improving educational practice 9
Administrative services 10
Direct student services 10
Other functions 10

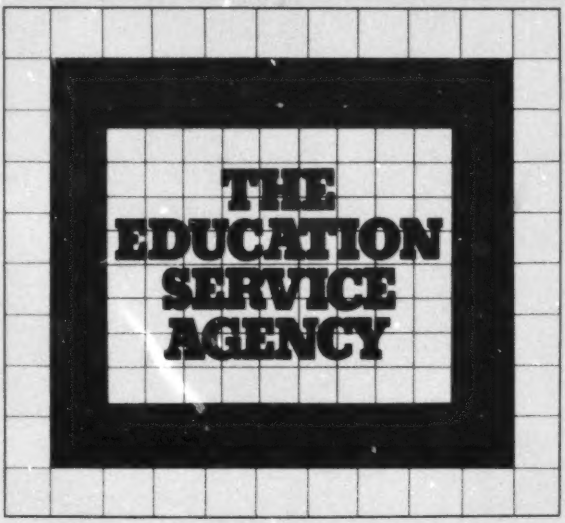
Chapter 4
THE ESA IN THE FUTURE 13
Short-term predictions: The next five years 14
Structure 14
Staff 15
Dealing with declining resources 16
Services to low incidence populations 17
Services to non-public schools 17
ESAs and universities 18
The "issues manager" 18
Technology 19
Influencing legislation 20
Middle-term predictions: Ten to twelve years 21
Staff 21
Technology 23
ESAs and universities 23

ESAs and local schools 23
Long-term Predictions: The turn of the century 24

Chapter 5
RECOMMENDATIONS 27

SUMMARY 29

REFERENCES 31



Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Establishing appropriate and effective working relationships among different units of educational government is a complex task, one that has been complicated in recent decades by a proliferation of organizations and agencies engaged in school improvement. Among these are career resource centers, work/education councils, community colleges, instructional media and materials centers, and education service agencies.

Each of these organizations seeks to coordinate services to improve student learning and each responds to client needs according to tradition, legislation, or formal and informal agreements.

This publication will examine possible directions for the education service agency (ESA). It also looks briefly at the history of the ESA and reviews recent research on its present status.

What is an ESA?

The education service agency was defined by the National Education Association in 1963 as "an agency that operates at a regional level, giving coordination and supplementary services to local school districts and serving as a link between

these basic administrative units and the state education authority." Three basic ESA patterns were identified in a 1979 study conducted by Stephens Associates for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). These are:

- **Special District.** This pattern creates a legally constituted unit of school government between the state education agency (SEA) and a collection of local education agencies (LEAs). Special districts are found in eleven states: California, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Special district ESAs are usually established by the state, or by the state and client LEAs together to provide services to both the SEA and the constituent local districts.
- **Regionalized agencies.** In this pattern, ESAs are established as a regional branch of the state agency. Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Oklahoma have regionalized units that deliver services to LEAs.
- **Cooperative agencies.** In this pattern, two or more LEAs sponsor an ESA to provide one or more common services. These units, which exist to some degree in thirteen states, provide services exclusively to member schools.

Some states have all three patterns of ESAs existing for their specified purposes. Ohio, for example, has the County Office of Education, which provides services as a *special district* ESA; the Special Education Regional Resource Center and the Field Services Area Coordinator, which are *regionalized* units; and the Regional Education Service Agency, which is a voluntary *cooperative*. ESAs in Michigan, on the other hand, have various kinds of networks, all of which are included in some way in the basic special district configuration.

The ESA in the past

The United States has a history of cooperative educational arrangements dating from the time when two or three colonial families developed an agreement to share a teacher for their children. Informal agreements such as these still exist, and voluntary cooperation still results in pragmatic solutions to mutual problems. More formal cooperatives have developed from these early beginnings. Some—county school offices—arose in the nineteenth century, but most ESAs were established in the 1960s and 70s.

Among the earliest recorded regional education service activities were those initiated in 1829 when Delaware's County Offices were established. The Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Oregon created the office and described the duties of a county school commissioner in 1849. Ironically, Delaware today is one of approximately a dozen states with no regional service agencies. Oregon, however, has shown a progressive and uninterrupted development of special district regional service agencies.

Stephens Associates reviewed the current development and status of education service agencies and reported in 1979 that networks existed in 26 states. Some networks covered entire states, some encompassed parts of states and still others were multi-purpose. A 1981 study found regional service agencies in 39 states. Although exact numbers are difficult to obtain, it is clear that regional service agencies are an established—and growing—pattern of educational cooperation.

The ESA today

Today ESAs are much more than county school offices. As a sign of their growing importance to the educational system, a new national association, the American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA), has been established under the umbrella of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to provide a communication network to air and discuss legislative, educational and organizational concerns. Special interest groups within the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) have also been developed. The AAESA Executive Director, Walter Turner, reports that in 1977, 25 million students in 12,000 local school districts were receiving some kind of education service from established ESAs. He also notes that ESAs spent $1.7 billion in that same year for the purpose of improving public education.

Chapter 2

NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each type of education service agency? Are there national characteristics that seem to be most important? A 1979 survey by Stephens Associates offered some answers.

It compared special service districts, regionalized units, and cooperatives in terms of governance, characteristics of the chief executive officer, financial characteristics, programs and services, staffing characteristics, and relationships to the state education agency.

Governance

Education service agencies generally follow the educational tradition of a lay governing board, usually one established in the legislation that created the units themselves. Members of the governing board may be appointed or elected, usually by constituent district boards. The number of board members and their qualifications vary from state to state and from network to network. Female and minority representation is minimal.

Most chief executive officers are white males with local education agency experience appointed by the governing board. They are generally paid about what their constituent LEA counterparts earn, although large constituent school district chief executive officers almost always have higher salaries. Salary and fringe benefits are usually higher in special district ESAs than in regionalized systems and voluntary cooperatives.

Finances

Some ESAs spend millions of dollars annually, other spend practically nothing. Regionalized ESAs are usually included in the state education agency budget. Revenues for special district and cooperative ESAs may come from federal, state, and local sources. Five systems have direct taxing authority (four special districts and one cooperative), the revenues from which are most often restricted to use for administrative costs, space, and specifically designated services. Most ESAs have limited fiscal independence; however, a precedent for state support is well established. This indicates, according to Stephens, "a degree of state commitment to the welfare of (ESAs)." Revenues of all units have generally increased since 1965.

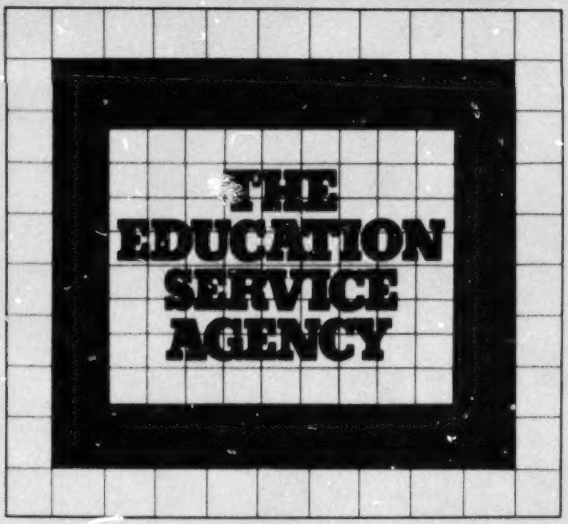
Programs and services

Education service agencies are most successful when they offer better and/or less expensive services than clients can provide for themselves. ESAs can frequently do a more cost effective job of providing direct services to specialized groups, i.e., handicapped or vocational students. All ESAs have administrative services and expertise. Most offer support in the areas of education of the handicapped, media and library, staff development, curriculum, information, planning, gifted and talented education, vocational and occupational education, pre-kindergarten, and cooperative purchasing. Special districts generally offer data processing, fiscal, pupil/personnel, and federal program services. General academic instruction, research and development, adult education, alternative schools, bilingual and migrant education, evaluation, legislative, personnel, and outdoor/environmental consultation are also available. Very few ESAs were offering services to non-public schools at the time that Stephens collected data.

Staff relationships

The Stephens report shows that ninety percent of all education service agencies staff are in special district units, eight percent in cooperatives, and two percent in regional systems. Sixty-seven percent of all ESA staff are reported to be in three states: New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. Therefore, it is difficult to make national generalizations because two-thirds of the data come from only three states. Certain trends, however, can be noted. For example, staff collective bargaining practices appear to be related to ESA type. Special districts have more collective bargaining units than cooperatives; in regionalized ESA units collective bargaining is frequently prohibited. In special districts or regional units, staff salaries are directly affected by, and comparable to (or slightly higher than), those paid for similar or related services in constituent districts. In cooperative units, staff salaries are generally lower than those of constituents. Thirty percent of all staffs are in federal programs and paid with federal funds. Screening of staff by constituent local education agency personnel is common in cooperatives and regionalized ESAs and rare in special districts. State education agency involvement in staff screening is almost non-existent in cooperatives, uncommon in the special district, and a general practice in regionalized units.

ESAs are increasingly being called on to regulate and enforce state mandates. Regionalized units, of course, are most frequently involved in state regulation. However, special service ESAs and cooperative units (though less frequently and usually only on a voluntary basis) also oversee specific state education agency functions that affect their constituents. ESAs can fulfill a unique role in carrying out state regulations; as middle level agencies, ESAs can be both objective about state requirements and responsive to local needs.



Chapter 3

RESEARCH: WHAT'S THE LATEST

Education service agencies seem particularly well suited to solving certain problems for local school districts. During the past several years, a number of researchers have examined ESAs, and they have observed that successful service agencies are meeting the needs of their constituents in a number of ways.

Improving educational practice

ESAs improve the ways educators use information about better educational practices. Researchers Yin and Gwaltney conducted an intensive case study of three ESAs—the Wayne County Intermediate School District in Michigan, a special district; the Northern Colorado Educational Board of Cooperative Services, a cooperative; and the Educational Improvement Center-South in New Jersey, a regionalized agency. They found that ESAs can improve staff development and information retrieval, can serve as a link to other resource agencies, and can provide broad organizational support. The keys to the effectiveness of ESAs in these areas seem to be:

- The ESA needs access to external resources.
- ESA staff need to develop good working relationships and networks with user district staffs.
- Both the ESA and its constituent districts must derive mutual and readily identified benefits from collaborating.
- In general, collaborative functions should involve mandates established by the state education agency.

Administrative services

Education service agencies frequently provide administrative services, which may produce local cost savings. For example, Michigan intermediate school districts currently provide the following kinds of support: data processing for administrative purposes, staff development of non-instructional personnel, assistance with collective bargaining negotiations, training school board members, millage election assistance, technical assistance for school lunch programs, pupil personnel accounting, transportation, analyses of federal and state regulations, creating a substitute teacher pool, and public relations. ESAs in other areas manage payrolls and student records, operate school buses, and purchase supplies and materials for a number of districts. In each case, these ESA services improve educational operation to the extent that they release local constituent dollars and staff for instruction.

Direct student services

ESAs can minimize financial and geographic barriers that affect access to available educational programs. Many ESAs now provide direct services in three areas: special, vocational, and adult education. In each case, according to Carolyn Moran and Larry Hutchins, by pooling the number of students to be served, ESAs can provide cost effective instruction to these special populations.

Other functions

Because education service agencies are so diverse, they can be flexible enough to respond to the needs of their clients, can establish creative new organizational patterns with other educational partners, and can try new patterns and techniques for problem-solving and shared decision-making.

ESAs should continue to adopt roles and functions that are, "comprehensive, flexible, of high quality, and responsive to

the needs of the population served," says Rae M. Levis in an earlier publication. These roles include educational leadership; educational planning; providing specifically requested LEA services; influencing federal, state, and local educational legislation; improving educational programs; information use, and coordination of regional services.

It is no accident that ESAs are growing both in numbers and in the responsibilities they carry out. They offer a number of strengths. They are accessible in an era when there is a commitment to total accessibility to the education system. ESAs are agencies that can enhance education opportunity. They can interpret education policies and provide feedback to policy makers. ESAs can provide economic revitalization by helping the local education agency and industry rediscover the magic of a marketable skill in the educational scheme. In a nation obsessed with education accountability, the ESA can demonstrate accountability both to its constituents and to the state education agency. In times of declining enrollments and resources, the ESA can provide cost effective programs and services. It is the agency leading the search for a better education for *all* people. Finally, the education service agency is flexible at a time when radically new demands are being made on all levels of the education system. Clearly, the education service agency at present is uniquely equipped to address a number of educational concerns. The solutions it finds to some of today's problems will very likely influence its future.

Chapter 4

THE ESA IN THE FUTURE

The future of the education service agency will be shaped by the response of the total education system to a number of key social questions: How will our society educate minorities? How can education help everyone achieve the "good life?" (And, indeed, how do we define the "good life?"). What is the place of education in the post-industrial world? How can the education system help in planning for energy shifts and a possible economy of shortages? What part does education play in identifying human values?

There are also some specific internal questions about the education system that will affect the future of the ESA: How does the system respond to research? How does it react to possible changes in teaching and learning styles as a result of technological advances? How do educators define basic skills? How does the system interact with the individual? What is the relationship between the education system and human service agencies?

At the most basic level, however, the future of the education service agency will ultimately depend on the answer to one

question: How well does it provide services to its clients without infringing on the defined responsibilities of other member agencies in the system? The future of any service agency eventually rests on whether those who use it believe that the agency provides services of high quality in appropriate quantity.

In examining possible future roles for the education service agency, some short range and long range predictions are made here. To facilitate these forecasts, the future is divided into three segments—the short term (the next five years), the middle term (ten to twelve years from now), and the long term (the turn of the century). The forecast for the short term is based on extentions of present activities and directions noted in preceding pages. Predictions for the middle term are based on observable trends in the current status and possible development of ESAs. The section on long term predictions includes blue sky guesses based on scenarios of futurists who are scrutinizing every aspect of life in the year 2000.

Short-term predictions: The next five years

For the education service agency, the future is now. The most likely futures of existing ESAs are probably being called challenges in each orgnization today. Some are related to the structure, size, and management of the unit. For example, will a given ESA continue to be structured as a voluntary cooperative? Would it be better off to work for state legislation to legalize its status and activities? Should it approach the state education agency and assume greater regulatory responsibilities? Answers to these questions about structure are often related to the challenge of ideal size: How many local education agencies should be served? Of what size? In how large a geographic area? By how many staff? How will staff be managed and assigned to constituents?

Structure

It seems safe to say that the diversity of ESAs will not change in the near future. The agencies were grounded on the principles of institutional cooperation and shared decision-making among levels of educational government committed to educational improvement. The ESA with creative staff will provide leadership to implement that change. Furthermore, ESAs are diverse because their constituents are diverse. The diversity in structure, size, and management makes the ESA more im-

mediately responsive to constituent needs. Flexibility will be necessary as economic, social, political, and technological changes emerge.

There are negative forces that will constrain changes in ESA structure, size, and management in the near future also. Consolidating small ESA units would create staffing duplication—an unpopular situation when times are hard. Splitting large districts would notably reduce the budget of the original ESA unit and would carry staff reduction implications. Units created to handle problems of sparse population or of urban/suburban interchange are unlikely to reorganize without outside pressure.

For all these reasons, education service agencies will not change the three basic structures that currently exist in the near future. Although there will be attempts to consolidate small units to provide greater cost effectiveness, large units with records of appropriate service will not be split. Management of services and resources will come under close scrutiny as constituent districts undergo tax revolts and other pressure from school critics. As a result of this scrutiny, ESAs will search for creative ways to reduce their own costs and improve their services, i.e., manage their own resources more effectively. In the short term, the structure, size and management of ESAs will be based almost entirely on economics.

Staff

Since the days of the county school office, education service agencies have employed staff to consult with constituents about their problems, issues, resources, and programs. In the past, these consultants were visiting teachers, advisors, inspectors, and monitors who dealt with all phases of local education agency life. A county school officer's report in Wayne County documented the sorry state of school outhouses with their "sin-scarred" walls.

ESAs maintained the tradition of teacher-experts, often subject-matter specialists who demonstrated new techniques and advised teachers about implementing change and managing classes. Later the "teacher expert" became a consultant skilled in needs identification, problem-solving, and evaluation. Staff development evolved logically and consultants, working to improve education began to work with teachers, emphasizing process. They also began to consult with administrators, since

instructional change seemed to be most successful when administrative support existed. Currently in ESAs across the nation, consultants may be specialists or generalists, may work with a variety of constituent personnel, may work in interdisciplinary teams, may "market" new services and may broker resources. The direction of these services in the short term is the key to continued ESA success.

During the next five years, consultants will also be involved in organizational development activities and in enhancing quality of work life in education systems. These two areas are closely related, so consultants will confer with participants in the organization who will enhance quality of work life, improve the outcomes of education, and influence the design of their organizations. ESA consultants will have assumed leadership in their own organizations to improve quality of work life and organizational patterns so that the ESA becomes a model for other agencies.

Dealing with declining resources

The challenge of declining resources also affects the future of ESAs. In most communities, citizens seem to be demanding both reduced taxes and improved educational results. Public frustration can lead to education tax proposals that may seriously damage public education. Stability and reasonable equalization of local education agency finances will significantly improve education by allowing educators to use their professional skills to improve learning rather than to keep the schools open.

In the near future, ESAs will respond to this challenge by providing public relations services to constituent districts. The public relations specialist will assist constituents in managing millage elections, in letting the community know about local school achievements, in developing news releases, in interpreting policies of boards of education, and in formulating a total community communication plan to maintain public confidence and trust in the education system.

Because of declining resources ESAs are likely to consolidate services in the near future. For example, when ESAs began to provide administrative services through data processing units, the size of the computer was a limiting factor. Today's data processing centers usually have excess computing capacity. In the very likely future a single ESA will provide

administrative data processing services to several other ESAs. The resulting savings will be passed on to constituent districts which have traditionally been assessed for data processing costs.

ESAs will have to deal with declining resources by reassigning and realigning staff, reducing administrative positions, not filling vacancies as they occur, training local trainers and establishing planning teams to help constituents to use empty classrooms and buildings more effectively. Education service agencies can also encourage cooperative arrangements among LEAs with declining enrollments. When small constituent school districts are unable to provide advanced or even complete high school programs, ESAs will facilitate cooperative efforts across school district boundaries, possibly even providing transportation. ESAs can maintain lists of school volunteers in specific instructional areas where collective bargaining agreements do not prohibit them. A corps of grants, planning, and evaluation specialists in the ESA will help constituents identify human, federal, state, and foundation resources to meet local needs.

Services to low incidence populations

The ESA will increase direct services in special, vocational, and adult education to coordinate areas of overlap and provide greater cost effectiveness with regionalized services for low incidence populations. Vocational and adult education services will be coordinated with job training and placement. ESA staffs will provide leadership in coordinating the activities of employment and training service providers, work/education councils, and community colleges. Special education services will continue to be provided much as they currently are, but regulations mandating mainstreaming and the least restrictive environment will create more interdisciplinary approaches to service delivery and consultation. More activities will be geared to parents of handicapped students and to coordinating home and educational services. Constituent LEAs will encourage ESA direct services to the handicapped and will use scarce resources to pay for part of these regional services.

Services to non-public schools

Another predictable area of ESA expansion in the near future is in service to private, non-profit schools. The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 has dramaticaly

shifted provisions for educational services and programs to the state, and Chapter 2 of this legislation specifically provides for resources to non-public schools. Since these non-public schools cannot directly receive federal funds, some other agency will receive, disburse, and monitor the funds. Where ESAs exist, they will play a major role in providing services to private sector schools and in coordinating resources among these schools and local public schools for better instruction, less duplication of services, and greater cost effectiveness.

ESAs and universities

Problems have traditionally—but unnecessarily—existed between education service agencies and universities within their service areas. As scarce resources become more scarce, there is a blurring of traditional responsibilities and identification of clients. University professors offer staff development for university credit directly to ESA constituent schools. These professors are often accused of receiving pay for services that ESA staffs provide as part of their mission. They are perceived as rectifying (for pay) the mistakes they made in their own teacher education programs. On the other hand, ESA staffs are viewed as interlopers who provide instruction and develop research programs that are within the purview and authority of the university. In the very likely future, ESAs will develop mutually beneficial partnerships with universities. Partnership implies collaboration, coorperation, coordination, association, sharing, and equality, and the ESAs will assume the responsibility for overcoming separation and social distance from the university and its programs. The ESA will consciously make this a part of its immediate future because by working together the university and the educational service agency will enhance the quality of learning life for teachers and their students.

The "issues manager"

ESAs will continue to serve as resource centers by helping constituent districts use information. In this capacity ESA staffs today link human, financial, technical, and educational resources; they retrieve information on a wide range of educational topics; and they act as liaison to active, professional networks. In the very likely future, ESAs will expand these services by developing the position of "issues manager," a staff member who will identify emerging social, economic,

and political issues that will affect constituent local districts and their educational programs for students. The "issues manager" will then provide planning sessions; discussion seminars for local citizens, political activists, and the educational community; and evaluation of action plans. The "issues manager" will help the ESA become a community resource as well as an educational one—a center for highly technical and specific education know-how with a corps of professionals having a mission to improve education. The education service agency resource center will be evaluated regularly, and will systematically share knowledge about learning and teaching processes.

Technology

It is certain that ESAs must learn to deal with technological advances, their impact on existing educational hierarchies, and their methods of imparting knowledge in the very likely future. Although both local education agencies and state education agencies are actively searching for ways to incorporate technology into current educational programs, it is the ESA that is trying to harness technology and education together. Many LEAs have purchased microprocessors and are now trying to determine what to do with them. The state agencies have often made the purchase funds available. Task forces at all educational levels are examining computer uses and related problems. These task forces have divided educational computing into two areas: student instructional services (which include computer literacy, problem solving, and vocational uses) and instructional management services (which provide support such as test development and scoring and computer managed instruction to teachers and administrators). Although in the distant future other technological advances such as microwaves, robotics, lasers, and genetic engineering will affect the services of the ESA, in the near future, the word "technology" will mean "computers."

Today many ESAs have instructional computing teams composed of consultants with backgrounds in education and computer science. With loyalties to both disciplines, these people are pioneering methods to raise awareness and develop local educators' skills in appropriate instructional uses of computers. They are evaluating software, developing curriculum, defining basic computer skills, and running computer camps.

And what likely future do these activities foretell?

The ESA, through this new breed of consultant, will provide the impetus for the appropriate use of the computer as a teaching and learning tool. The educational computing team will provide awareness, skills, and knowledge to other ESA staff in the classroom use of computers. ESA staff will work with staffs of other educational institutions to coordinate the transition from using the computer as an *adjunct* to other learning tools to using it as a *replacement* for them. ESA staff will also move the computer as an information source, and will begin to anticipate trends and to examine ways to coordinate all technologies for learning and teaching. In the immediate future, ESAs will undergo some conflict concerning appropriate departments to handle instructional computing technology. Computers will probably eventually be classified as another media resource, but in the near future they are likely to be kept separate, with decision-makers maintaining that their differences require specialized activities.

In sum, the ESA will provide the necessary spark to use present and emerging technology to improve instruction. It will lead the way to a system-wide, state-wide, national commitment to computer literacy.

Influencing legislation

A few ESAs are already active in influencing legislation, and the American Association of Educational Service Agencies (AAESA) lists this as one of their major functions. ESAs will continue to expand political activities and will become a strong influence on developing legislation to address education issues and solve education problems. They will become advocates for legislation to aid their constituent districts. They will help overcome educational fragmentation. They will analyze and interpret existing and proposed legislation. They will support sound local, state, and Federal education legislation by giving testimony before appropriate committees and providing information to agencies and policy-makers. As they develop this legislative role, they will see its relationship to another ESA role—that of advocate for and coordinator of intergovernmental services in its region. This advocate/coordinator role will cause the ESA to represent and express the interests, concerns, and priorities to the total educational community in relationship to other governmental, health, welfare, social

and school service deliverers. This will help the ESA to develop further its advocacy for the powerless.

Middle-term predictions: Ten to twelve years

Middle-term predictions are necessarily based on a less distinct view of the education service agency in ten to twelve years. Some things, however, are crystal clear. In 1995, ESAs will exist in all fifty states. Even in Hawaii, where there is a state school system, there will be regionalized units with specified functions, particularly in the area of information use. The ESAs will have a common name. . . and it will not be the education service agency. Someone will have figured out that local, county, and state units are *all* education service agencies, and that the only difference among them is that they serve different populations. When that happens, the name will become REGIONAL EDUCATION AGENCY, the REA. A few diehards will cling to the word *service* in their title and call themselves Regional Education *Service* Agencies (RESAs), but REA will be seen to fit well with SEA and LEA. The structure of the REA will still be flexible. Cooperatives and regionalized units, however, will have largely disappeared, having been replaced by legally constituted organizations between the state agency and a collection of local education agencies. These REAs will have been specially created by legislation. All will provide services to both the state education agency and constituent local districts.

The ESA will be sensitive to the tradition of local control of education and to the local community's authority to establish curriculum and programs that fit community values and needs. In a society that is becoming more centralized as it moves from an industrial to an information economy, the role of the ESA in protecting diversity through its advocacy of its local districts will be increasingly important. While supporting the individuality and integrity of the local agency, the ESA will simultaneously provide more and more services that are currently duplicated in the local district, e.g., financial services and transportation.

Staff

The ESA will provide increased consultation to local education agencies in preschool education as the local district responds to the demand for earlier school programs for work-

ing parents. Latch key programs will also flourish in the local schools, and ESA staffs will provide curriculum and educational support to make these activities instructional and not custodial.

ESA consultants will be generalists. Because of the information explosion, it will be impossible for a subject area consultant to know everything in his or her field. However, because of new technology that can make enormous quantities of information quickly and effectively available to almost anyone, it will no longer be necessary for a consultant be an information provider. Instead, ESA consultants will focus on process, jointly seeking solutions to commonly identified problems with all LEA personnel involved in instruction. Consultants will also identify new areas for staff development, broker the services of other experts (from universities, other ESAs, business and industry, and the community) and disseminate information about proven educational innovations and practices. Consultants will be proactive rather than reactive about educational research and good educational practice. They will use research on time-on-task and classroom management, but the consultants will also recognize the developmental nature of learning theories and teaching strategies and will accept new research-proven techniques as they emerge. The role of the consultant will continue to evolve with more emphasis being placed on vocational and related skills. The ESA will assist constituent schools to prepare students for *work*, which is abundant, rather than for *jobs*, which will still be scarce.

The service agency will recognize the futility in trying to predict the knowledge or behaviors needed for the 90,000 different occupations in our society, and will instead assist the local school produce students who are able to solve problems and make good choices. The ESA will lead the way in relating technical and liberal arts studies in schools to enhance the quality of life in the technological workplace.

Neighboring ESAs will probably plan together to share staff and reduce unnecessary duplication, e.g., services of graphics and data processing departments and transportation of special populations. They will carefully examine their direct student services, evaluating what exists and planning with constituents and lawmakers to develop the most appropriate delivery mechanisms.

Technology

A cadre of consulting staff in ESAs will continue their own educations, keeping up with the increasing pace of change. The kind of staff development that started them on the road to instructional computing will maintain and support them as they incorporate other technologies into daily education. They will use interactive television, electronic office equipment adapted to the classroom, microwave links between classrooms and school buildings, weather prediction, and teleconferencing. They will work with the local schools to incorporate changes in attitudes and schedules that will take place at the local level. They will continue to demonstrate their commitment to research-tested instructional innovation.

Much of this, however, will be done by telephone or other video devices. As energy crises become acute, teleshopping for educational answers will become more common. Fortunately, by 1993 the videophone will be standard equipment in ESAs and local schools.

ESAs and universities

In this probable future, ESAs and universities will be working together much more closely—particularly in the area of teacher education. ESA staffs will continue to work with new, reassigned, and other teachers to enhance their skills, often with university staff. As a result of these joint efforts, preservice teacher education will change. The ESA will bring together the resources of the university, which begins the training of the future teacher, and the LEA, which ultimately hires the trained teacher. With universities, ESAs will initiate and develop local internships and training programs for needed teachers with specific skills. Teachers who are not competent or happy in the profession will be counseled out.

ESAs and local schools

The structure of the ESA will not have changed dramatically in this next decade. It will still be oriented to providing service and meeting needs. The structure of the local school, however, will have changed. Buildings with classrooms and teachers will still be in the neighborhood, but the neighborhood will be different. Many secondary schools will offer specialized curricula. Since it has long been known that students don't all learn at the same rate or in the same way, well-designed programs (some self-instructional) will meet the need for in-

dividualization without setting the pace for thirty students. Class size, format, teaching style and method, and learning environment will all vary. These changes will not be haphazard but will reflect the things that are known about how learning takes place. ESAs will have staffs trained to field test new theories and implement them as they are proven.

Long-term predictions: The turn of the century

In the extensive writing that has offered predictions about the 21st century, there have been few mentions of the education service agency. However, it should be remembered that in 1948 a respected science magazine reported "Landing and moving around on the moon offers so many serious problems for human beings that it may take science another two hundred years to lick them." By the year 2003, there will *certainly* be ESAs.

In that distant future, ESAs will still lead the way toward better instruction. They will, however, beam signals to various receivers—some to formal classrooms with teachers and students, some to homes where adults and youth are learning together, some to industry for training workers, some to learning centers where students are teaching students, some to recreation centers, etc. Some of the telecasts will be live and interactive; some will be videotext, some teletext. Homes, schools, and factories will all use TV screens and keyboards linked to a computerized network of educational services originating from the ESA. Today we can only dream of what Toffler calls "cottage education," but we can predict with certainty community learning, formal and informal classrooms, youth and adults teaching and learning from each other, and a personalized, individualized curriculum that recognizes human uniqueness. The ESA has a role in that dream.

Neighborhood schools will be local resources and community extension service centers in 2003. They will provide educational guidance and testing, individual and family personal counseling, career guidance, training programs, job placement, recreation, and laboratory and hands-on problem solving classes for youth and adults. They will operate 24 hours a day. ESAs will provide media and materials, human resources, and direct services to special groups in these centers. The ESA will also provide or facilitate lifelong learning.

When the ESA staffs are not working with neighborhood schools, their issues managers will be working with other educational interest groups to examine the goals of formal education, analyze major social forces, recommend policy directions, and seek solutions to economic problems. ESAs will be highly politicized and will maintain strong lobbies to influence federal education policy and direction and to support appropriate state legislation without allowing control from either level of government.

Education service agencies have been examined in the preceding pages as they exist today and as they may exist sometime in the future. What they become during the span of time in the predictions will not be a matter of chance but rather a result of careful planning based on sharing benefits and correcting problems. One of history's clearest lessons is that institutional survival is based on adaptation to change. This is a time of great and rapid change. The ESAs adaptation to these changes will be based on the daily decisions of its administration and staff. For the ESA, the future is now.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

The education service agency is the subject of considerable speculation as its role in the education system evolves. Both ESA constituents and staff have offered many suggestions about its operational, economic, and social influence and value. Some of these suggestions have led to immediate changes; others are likely to occur in the near future, and still others offer possibilities for action in the distant future. A few recommendations for action to create a satisfying and outstanding future for the ESA follow:

- ESAs must create a climate conducive to shared decision-making with constituents regarding services and areas of responsibility.
- ESA staffs should continue their own professional development, especially in emergent educational areas. They must be proactive for proven educational research and advocates for the powerless.
- ESAs should support comprehensive educational research and development and evaluation studies about their current and future programs. They should continue their present commitment to serving as an agency that communicates, integrates, and coordinates.

- The ESA should expand its outreach to and links with other educational units, particularly higher education. Since no single organization can respond to *all* educational practitioners, ESAs should cooperate with other agencies that are philosophically and geographically close enough to provide complementary services.
- ESA staffs need to anticipate the consequences of new technologies on teaching and learning. They should review theories on the role of education as a change agent advocated in the 1960s in the light of the impact of emerging technological advances on education.
- The ESA should be especially sensitive to the issue of local control of education, as the movement from an industrialized to an information economy creates increased pressures for centralization. In this way, the ESA can protect and value diversity by supporting the individuality and integrity of the local unit of school government.
- The ESA should regularly examine and evaluate the services it provides to its constituents. It should reassign staff, redefine positions, and realign priorities on the basis of economic, social, and political realities.
- The ESA should remain flexible, continuing to review, redesign, and refine its activities in response to information and feedback from its constituents.
- The ESA should continue to expand its role in influencing education legislation at all governmental levels. The purpose of the ESA lobbying efforts should be improvement of the educational system and solution to problems that are responsive to legislation.

SUMMARY

THE EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY - WHERE NEXT?

The education service agency (ESA) is a significant—and growing—part of the nation's educational system. ESAs provide a number of services to their constituents: for example, they teach students, schedule classes, run payrolls, evaluate programs, improve curriculum, conduct staff development, engage in long range planning, and purchase supplies and equipment.

ESAs are uniquely structured to adapt to the changing future of education. They are accessible in an era when there is a commitment to educational accessibility. They are cost effective in a time of declining enrollments and resources. They are flexible at a time when radically new demands are being made on all levels of the education system.

Clearly, ESAs can play a major role in the future of our country's educational system. But that role will be shaped by the answers to a number of questions that are confronting ESAs today: Is there one best organizational pattern for ESAs?

What services should ESAs provide? What kind of staff members are needed to provide these services? How can ESAs deal with the problems of declining resources? How can ESAs and universities work together?

This publication explores the education service agency's past and present. It then makes some predictions about the ESA. Finally, it offers some recommendations.

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